

SAFETY MESSAGE

Your Personal Safety is our #1 Priority

Preventing Sprains and Strains

Definitions

Leading causes of workers' comp claims

Sprains and strains can occur practically anywhere, anytime: on the job, in your home, and during sports and other recreational activities. You probably know about sprained ankles, elbows, and lower back pain.

According to the National Safety Council, sprains and strains are among the nation's leading causes of workers' compensation claims.

Most of these injuries are directly related to lifting and handling materials on the job.

In order to understand these injuries and learn to prevent them, it is necessary to begin with some basic definitions.

Ligaments

Doctors usually speak of ligaments and tendons when they define sprains and strains.

Ligaments are the tough, fibrous, cord-like materials that connect bone to bone. Ligaments are most commonly associated with the joints: at the elbow where the forearm attaches to the upper arm, at the knee, at the shoulder, at the wrist, at the hip.

Tendons

Tendons are very similar to ligaments. These tough cords of connective tissue attach muscle to muscle and muscle to bone. They transmit the force exerted by muscle.

Strains

Strains are stretched ligaments and tendons. A strain usually occurs whenever a muscle is stretched beyond its limit.

Sprains

Sprains occur when a muscle is stretched too much and ligaments pull, sometimes tearing. Doctors define a sprain as over stretching and tearing connective tissue.

Reasons for sprains and strains

There are many reasons for the large number of sprains and strains that occur.

People lift things too heavy for them. They don't always lift things correctly, carry them safely, or take care when they put the loads down.

Sometimes they overreach or overextend a part of the body when they reach over something to pick up a load. Sometimes they try to reach something on the top shelf without using a proper stool or ladder.

Many sprains and strains occur when people slip on wet floors, overextending muscles when they attempt to avoid falling.

Preventive Action

Basic rules of prevention

What can we do to minimize these injuries?

- Keep yourself in shape. Muscles have to be conditioned if they are to perform rigorous jobs.
- Always wear shoes with firm, slip-resistant soles.
- Make sure your travel path is clear and well lighted before lifting or moving a load.
- Size up the job before you begin. Look for ways to eliminate or reduce lifting, lowering, pushing, pulling, and carrying whenever possible.
- Use the techniques you learned earlier when lifting; get close to the load with feet apart to maintain balance; bend your knees and use your legs to lift; hold the load close to your body to minimize back strain; avoid twisting your body while handling a load.
- Use a step stool or ladder to avoid overreaching. Test the weight of the load before removing it from its shelf.
- Use special care when lifting an object out of a bin, container, or similar storage area. The standard lift technique may be almost impossible. Stand with your feet apart, slightly bend your knees, and start to squat, bending at the hip joints instead of the waist. This is the same motion as when you begin to sit in a chair.
- Use your safety sense. If the load is too heavy or hard-to-reach, get help!